

## **Producing content for a regional TV station**

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2009 E-Fellow

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### **Introduction**

The doors of 2009 opened to the exciting reality of my E-fellowship award plus the chance to work alongside students in an e-learning adventure. My inquiry question was linked to discovering the impact of an authentic audience on student engagement and motivation in literacy. Did access to a real audience via our children's television show, Pukeko Echo, make a difference to their literacy learning?

Manaia View School is a decile 1 school in Whangarei that has established a partnership with 155, an alternate education provider, and Northtech, the local polytechnic, which runs Channel North, a regional TV station. Channel North is based at the school and covers approximately 46,000 homes, thus providing a truly real audience. Pukeko Echo is the children's television show produced by the school children for Channel North. This first went to air in Term 4 2008. During that initial programme development time the question of impact on student engagement and literacy achievement became an ongoing professional question that led naturally into my fellowship inquiry.

Term 1 2009 saw the selection of our student groups. Selection focused around student interest, lack of motivation and achievement. The Y4/5/6 team was made up of students who, while they had shown an interest in ICT, had not had the opportunity to develop digital storytelling and movie production tools. It included students from each of the

middle school syndicate including our Y4–6 immersion class, and a Y7–8 group, known as the Creative Literacy Media team, which included a number of students with significant TV experience. Some held key roles in Pukeko Echo, while others were ICT interested but were not achieving to potential. This senior group provided a key inspirational role for the fellowship team.

During this first term the larger group split into smaller ‘film teams’ of 3–4 students, who worked alongside Alex Mason, our P.E.T. producer, developing their film making skills. The use of professional TV-quality movie cameras, sound equipment, lighting and so on, along with taking on all the key roles needed to ensure a successful TV show, formed a critical part of the learning, as students worked towards earning their film crew licence. New skills, equipment use and applications were grasped with such speed and enthusiasm, and put to effective use, that many were the times when identifying the learner or teacher was impossible.

This training support sat alongside each film team’s creation of their own independent movie that was to be shown on Pukeko Echo. The teams were given the freedom to select their theme/story, their medium, and the roles the students adopted when working together as a film production team.

The film crews spent each Wednesday creating and producing their own films, as well as working on the filming of other segments for Pukeko Echo. These other segments included science challenges, jokes, crazy facts, te reo, art and craft etc., and allowed the students to experience the buzz of being on screen as well as building their understandings of the film production process: the need for storyboarding, script writing, shot planning, editing, and so on. They soon learnt that one take was not always enough, and the discussions that followed their watching and analysing their productions quickly became intensely constructive, sensitive and professional. The growth in their co-operative team skills was amazing. Their ideas and ownership of segment content, along with the ability to add their own comments, cover for script glitches, and to demand of themselves a professional result, all became second nature.

The increasing confidence and skills they got from producing segments for Alex transferred into their own movie productions. Stop-go animation using iCan Animate and filming a play were the two mediums chosen. The animation crews used 3D wooden backdrops (made by our tech staff) along with puppets, toys, twigs – in fact whatever resources were available to create their scene.



Figure 1: A student is creating the background scenery ready for filming

The other crew used the school playground, having checked it out carefully before filming and modifying their storyboard to fit. Cameras, sound equipment and so on were booked and it was all ‘action’. Engagement, motivation and commitment were certainly not an issue as film crews remained on task, totally focused each Wednesday on completing their movie. The rich discussions that took place as teams tried to solve an animation problem or how they were going to improvise to get a shot right, were monitored and illustrated clearly both their demonstration of most key competencies

and their achievement of a number of specific literacy learning objectives.

After weeks of planning, scripting, creating, filming and refilming, came the tasks of editing, adding sound and credits. This led to some very interesting discussions as students resolved who was undertaking which aspects of editing and post-production. It was here that individuals worked most independently within the teams, as one would be creating the music using Garageband, while another was editing using iMovie, another working on voice-over and credits, and so on, coming together only as needed to discuss direction and what it was all looking like overall.



Figure 2: Students are involved in editing a movie

The commitment to the very best final result possible was amazing, with students seeking advice from other students, from staff and from the professionals working for Channel North next door.



The immense pride and exuberance that followed as their movies were screened isn't describable. It was one thing to be fronting up each show as a presenter, cameraman or segment manager, but it obviously had more impact to have your film crew's own work screened. When asked about this the students said that it was because it was *all* their work – their ideas, their efforts, their working together, and their names on the credits. They also commented with pride that it was a *team* success.



Figure 3: Students creating music, voice-overs and credits for video

Over the year the students were becoming known locally as a result of their local TV appearances, and this resulted in a group of them presenting a workshop at the National Maori Principals' Conference at Waitangi. Two of them were also lead presenters at our first student leaders' forum, and several acted as film crews filming the Coastal Cleanup project among other TV items. When Pukeko Echo celebrated its first birthday, our film crews wound the year up with some intense reflection. The Y7/8 team had a number of

students moving on to college and the question arose about whether there would be an opportunity to continue to use their media skills. This led to the group putting together a movie called 'Are You Ready For Us?' for the High School. The Fellowship group saw the opportunities to play a more important role in Pukeko Echo and developed their own CVs outlining their skills, using Keynote. These reflections and CVs clearly articulated their engagement, motivation and achievement in the project, but also their confidence and self-belief. The students now had focus and goals, and were identifying their next learning steps: goals not only linked to literacy and media but to maths, art, and music as well.

Other significant impacts of the project that we noted were linked to student attendance, behaviour, attitude and general contribution. These students now step in and help others, express their opinions confidently and respectfully and seek assistance when needed. They consistently made good choices and readily transferred their team skills into their classroom and playground.

A more detailed account of the project can be found in the e-portfolio I created for the Fellowship. See: <http://dpnews.wikispaces.com/>

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